

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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R 061403Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7095
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 6290

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, XF, PLO, UR, US
SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEW OF ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS

REFS: A. MOSCOW 5617, B. 76 MOSCOW 20056 NOTAL,
C. MOSCOW 4487, D. TEL AVIV 3125

SUMMARY: MOSCOW'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PERENNIAL ARAB-
ISRAELI PROBLEM SEEMS MORE RELAXED THAN WAS THE CASE PRIOR
TO THE SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH GROMYKO IN LATE MARCH.
HAVING MET THE AMERICANS AND HAVING COMPLETED THEIR
CURRENT ROUND OF ME CONSULTATIONS BY HOSTING PLO CHIEF-
TAIN ARAFAT AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, THE SOVIET STILL
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PROFESS A BELIEF IN THE EFFICACY OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE,
BUT THEY HAVE ALSO BEEN REMINDED OF THE LIMITS OF THEIR
ABILITY TO MOVE THEIR ARAB AND PALESTINIAN PARTNERS
TOWARD THE TACTICAL COMPROMISES NECESSARY TO CONVENE
GENEVA AND TO MOVE BEYOND IT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE SOVIETS AND THE SYRIANS: ACCORDING TO BOTH

ARAB AND SOVIET SOURCES IN MOSCOW, THE SOVIETS TRIED BUT FAILED TO SELL THE SYRIANS AND THE PALESTINIANS ON THEIR TWO-STAGE IDEA FOR PLO REPRESENTATION AT GENEVA. INDEED ON THIS POINT THE SOVIETS WERE FORCED BY SYRIAN STUBBORNESS PUBLICLY TO REAFFIRM THEIR INITIAL POSITION ON PLO PARTICIPATION FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, WHICH BREZHNEV HAD BEEN ABLE TO AVOID EVEN IN SUCH MEETINGS AS THAT WITH ARAFAT.

2. WHILE MOSCOW FOUND HARD GOING ON THE PLO REPRESENTATION ISSUE, IT MUST HAVE GAINED SOME SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED CONFIDENCE FROM THE ASAD VISIT IN GENERAL. MOSCOW HAD PREVIOUSLY TAKEN STEPS TO MAINTAIN ITS GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REJECTION STATES-LIBYA AND IRAQ, BUT ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA REMAINED STRAINED DUE ABOVE ALL TO ITS OPPOSITION TO THE LEBANESE INTERVENTION PER SE, BUT REFLECTING ALSO ITS CONCERN OVER WHAT IT PERCEIVED AS COLLUSION AMONG THE SYRIANS, ISRAELIS, AND AMERICANS OVER THE INTERVENTION. ASAD'S VISIT WAS SUCCESSFUL FOR THE SYRIANS, WHO HAVE OBTAINED RELUCTANT SOVIET APPROVAL OF THE END RESULT OF THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION AND PERSUADED THE SOVIETS TO REOPEN THE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY PIPELINES. IT WAS ALSO SUCCESSFUL FOR THE SOVIETS WHO VISIBLY PATCHED UP THEIR STRAINED RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE OF THE IMPORTANT CONFRONTATION STATES, AND OBTAINED SYRIAN RECOGNITION OF MOSCOW'S SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES VIS A VIS GENEVA AND THE PPEACE SETTLEMENT TO COME (REF A, PARA 1). THIS IS CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPORTANT TO MOSCOW, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE UNWILLINGNESS OR THE INABILITY OF THE SOVIET UNION AND EGYPT TO IMPROVE THEIR ABYSMAL RELATIONSHIP.

3. THE SOVIETS AND THE PALESTINIANS: WE KNOW LESS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS AND OF THE SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD THEM. THE SOVIETS HAVE MADE MUCH OF INCREASED PALESTINIAN MODERATION, WHICH THEY CLAIM CHARACTERIZED THE PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING IN CAIRO IN MARCH, AND OF ARAFAT'S ENHANCED POLITICAL AND MILITARY ROLE, WHICH THEY PUBLICLY RECOGNIZED BY GRANTING HIM A LONG-DELAYED AUDIENCE WITH BREZHNEV. BUT THEY REMAIN IMPATIENT WITH THE INABILITY OF THE PALESTINIANS TO DEVELOP REAL POLITICAL UNITY AND TO ARTICULATE - AT LEAST IN PRIVATE - MORE PRECISE AND MORE REALISTIC POSITIONS WHICH WOULD FACILITATE THE CONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. NONETHELESS, SINCE THE U.S. IS NOT WILLING TO TALK TO THE PALESTINIANS AT ALL IN THE

PRESENT CONTEXT, THE SOVIET RELATIONSHIP WITH THE
PALESTINIANS REMAINS IMPORTANT AND FORMS A KEY ELEMENT
OF THE SOVIET CLAIM TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY ON
THE MIDDLE EAST STAGE.

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4. THE SOVIETS AND THE EGYPTIANS; MOSCOW'S CONFIDENCE THAT IT HAS DONE ALL THAT MIGHT REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO PUT ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ARABS AND THE PALESTINIANS IN SHAPE IS SEEMINGLY MARRED ONLY BY THE CONTINUED ADHERENCE OF THE EGYPTIANS TO THE AMERICAN CAMP. PORTRAYING ITSELF AS THE AGGRIEVED PARTY IN THIS CASE, MOSCOW APPARENTLY FEELS IT CAN DO NO MORE THAN MAKE A FEW LOW-LEVEL CONCILIATORY GESTURES FROM TIME TO TIME SUCH AS RETURNING 50 OF THE MIG-21 ENGINES SENT HERE FOR OVERHAUL OR SIGNING THE ANNUAL COMMERCIAL AGREEMENT (AFTER REPEATED DELAYS). BUT MOSCOW'S CONTINUED WORRY OVER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOSS OF EGYPT FOR ITS ME INVOLEMENT PLANS
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IS CLEAR AND EXPLAINS THE SHRILL NATURE OF SOVIET MEDIA REPORTING ON THE ALLEGED UNITY OF U.S. AND EGYPTIAN REPORTING ON THE ALLEGED UNITY OF U.S. AND EGYPTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD VARIOUS ME ISSUES DISCUSSED DURING PRESIDENT SADAT'S RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON. MOSCOW'S CHAMPIONING OF QADHAFI IN THE EGYPTIAN-LIBIAN DISPUTE ALSO RELECTS SOVIET EFFORTS TO PRESSURE SADAT. THE FORTHCOMING VISIT HERE OF THE PDRY FONMIN MAY ALSO BE SEEN AS A FURTHER STEP IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE SOVIET POSITION IN THE ME ALTHOUGH IT MAY ALSO BE RELATED TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RED SEA REGION.

5. THE SOVIETS AND THE ISRAELIS: BREZHNEV'S REFERENCE TO ISRAEL IN HIS JAN 18 AND APRIL 18 SPEECHES PLUS SOME RECENT SOVIET ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS INDICATIVE OF MOSCOW'S INTEREST IN IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL (REF D). HOWEVER, PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE WOULD STILL SEEM TO DEPEND ON A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE ME PEACE PROCESS WHICH WOULD ENABLE MOSCOW TO JUSTIFY TO ITS ARAB PARTNERS AN IMPROVEMENT IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL.

6. THE SOVIETS AND THE AMERICANS: MOSCOW'S INCREASED CONFIDENCE ABOUT ITS ROLE IN THE ME MAY ALSO BE THE RESULT OF ITS READING OF THE ME POLICY OF THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION, PARTICULARLY ITS EMPHASIS ON RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. AS THE NEW ADMINISTRATION BEGAN TO BE FORMED, MUCH WAS MADE BY OUR SOVIET CONTACTS OF THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION STUDY, "TOWARD PEACE IN THE ME", ALTHOUGH A CAREFUL STUDY OF THAT DOCUMENT SHOULD HAVE GIVEN LITTLE COMFORT TO SOVIET SUPPORTERS OF U.S.-SOVIET COOPERATION. BUT THE PRESIDENT'S SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS ON DEFENSIBLE BORDERS FOR ISRAEL AND A HOMELAND FOR THE PALESTINIANS CAUSED A CERTAIN NERVOUSNESS HERE,
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REFLECTED BY THE APPEARANCE IN THE SOVIET PRESS OF CRITICAL COMMENTS FROM ARAB AND PALESTINIAN SOURCES WHICH DISTORTED THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS - EVEN THOSE ON THE PALESTINIANS - INTO A POLICY OF 100 PERCENT SUPPORT FOR THE ISRAELIS. LITTLE MENTION WAS MADE OF U.S. SIGNALS WHICH RAN COUNTER TO THIS LINE SUCH AS THE DENIAL TO ISRAEL OF CONCUSSION BOMBS (THE RARE

REFERENCE TO WHICH WAS USUALLY ACCOMPANIES BY SOVIET COMMENT ON THE U.S. SUPPLY OF M-60 TANKS AND THE FLIR NIGHT VISION DEVISE) AND OF PERMISSION TO SELL THE KFIR FIGHTER TO ECUADOR. SOVIET MEDIA HAVE ALSO TREATED - ALTHOUGH RATHER CAUTIOUSLY - THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE U.S. MIGHT REFER TO DELAY THE CONVENING OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. WHETHER THIS REFLECTS MOSCOW'S DESIRE TO WISH AWAY A DELAY OR A NEW SOVIET PERCEPTION THAT A SHORT DELAY MIGHT BE IN ITS OWN INTERESTS IS NOT YET POSSIBLE TO SAY.

7. MOSCOW IS NOW GEARED UP FOR DETAILED TALKS ON THE ME WITH THE U.S. TWO WEEKS HENCE. HAVING TOUCHED BASE WITH ITS ARAB AND PALESTINIAN FRIENDS, IT IS AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTIES TO BE SURMOUNTED, OF THE LIMITS TO ITS INFLUENCE, AND OF THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THE U.S. ENJOYS IN THIS PARTICULAR PROCESS. NONETHELESS MOSCOW IS STILL PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH THE U.S., TO CONSIDER OTHER NEGOTIATING POSITIONS AND TO REACH A COMPROMISE SOLUTION IN THE REGION. THE QUESTION OF HOW LONG THIS IMAGE WILL OR CAN ENDURE WILL BE DETERMINED IN LARGE MEASURE BY GROMYKO'S PERCEPTION OF U.S. INTENTIONS IN THE REGION AFTER THE FORTHCOMING MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE. MOSCOW HAS ALREADY INDICATED THAT GENEVA IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF AND ALSO THAT IT CANNOT BE USED AS A SCREEN TO COVER U.S. UNILATERAL ACTIONS. SHOULD MOSCOW PERCEIVE THAT THE U.S. INTENDS ONCE AGAIN TO EXCLUDE IT FROM THE MIDDLE
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EAST SETTLEMENT PROCESS, THEN, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES, THE FACADE OF COOPERATION WHICH MOSCOW PRESENTS CAN BE DISMANTLED AS QUICKLY AS IT WAS ERECTED.
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Message Attributes

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